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Subject: PLoS Community Journals
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As discussed during our last Board meeting, we are proceeding with our plan to create community journals. At the request of the founders, we have delved more deeply into the plans for these journals, with the attached proposal the result of the last several weeks of discussion. It has been seen by Harold, Pat, and Mike, who have encouraged us to proceed with the first step: identifying editors-in-chief for the first 4 journals.

It is timely that we have just received an RFP from the International Society for Computational Biology, also attached. We will be responding to the RFP and, in preparation, will be discussing over the next week or so the fit between our own plans for PLoS Computational Biology and the needs of the society. If you have any thoughts on this, they would be most welcome.

Before we approach candidate Editors in Chief for the Community Journals, we need to explore in some detail our plans for PLoS Reports, and specifically how those plans impact the EICs of the community journals (for example, do the EICs double as scientific advisors for PLoS Reports, supplemented by scientific advisors from disciplines not represented in our own Community Journals? If PLoS Reports provides a home for every technically sound scientific paper, and the EICs of the Community Journals need to be prepared to offer publication in PLoS Reports to papers that meet that criterion but which they don't feel belong in their journals, does this have implications on the reviewing policy of the Community Journals?). We are holding that discussion Friday morning.

Minutes of all our meetings are available. Please let me know if there are specific meeting notes you would like to be sent to you.

Best,
Vivian

PLoS Community Journals¹

Executive Summary

The PLoS Community journals play a key role in PLoS' mission to demonstrate the viability of open access publishing in a model that could be adopted by society and nonprofit (and even commercial) publishers. In addition, they are an integral part of the paper flow into PLoS Reports, which represents the financial lynchpin of the PLoS publishing operation.

Editorial responsibility for these journals will rest with an academic editor-in-chief (EIC) and a group of 15-20 academic editors representing the breadth of the field to be covered by the journal. Within PLoS, primary responsibility for the journal will lie with the publication manager, with editorial oversight from the appropriate senior editor and support from the production staff. The EIC reports to the publications committee of PLoS.

PLoS will launch two new Community Journals in 2004Q4 to be followed by two more in 2005Q1. The subject areas were chosen based on a variety of factors affecting their likely success (see accompanying documents for details of the individual Journals proposed).

The four initial journals will be:

- PLoS Computational Biology
- PLoS Genetics
- PLoS Microbiology
- PLoS Ecology & Evolution

These journals will require three new staff to be hired this year, with two more to follow next year as the journals ramp up submissions. The total cost this year for these staff will be approximately \$130,000 in salaries and associated overheads, based on our current hiring schedule. The cost of those staff the following year would be approx \$200,000.

Each journal is expected to reach peak submissions of 100 papers a month over a two-year period and break even approximately 27 months after launch. At the time the journal breaks even, it will be publishing 30 research articles a month and will have cost \$400,000-\$450,000 to bring to that point.

Introduction

As discussed elsewhere, PLoS Community Journals cover a relatively large discipline and community of scientists in biology or medicine (equivalent to *Genetics*, *JCB*, *Ecology Letters*, *Genes & Development*, etc). They publish important/worthy science for

¹ Until recently known as Tier 2 journals. We are attempting to move away from *Tier n* nomenclature to avoid the subconscious implication of first-, second-, and third-rate articles.

the specific field and are the type of journal that you need to watch if you are in that field. Community Journals are mainly to be browsed online, rather than in print, and have limited front section, mostly scientist-written reviews.

Strategic Importance

The Community Journals are of particular importance to PLoS as exemplars of open access publishing. Although, at steady state, they do not contribute significantly to PLoS' overall financial health, each Community Journal is expected to operate just above break even and so can be used to demonstrate the financial viability of the publication-fee model when applied to a "typical" society journal. It is these journals that will represent the success of the "experiment in Open Access publishing" that PLoS represents.

In addition, these journals act as a key part in the paper flow from the high-end journals through to the high volume PLoS Reports. This flow, based on referrals from one journal to the next – "We don't think this paper is quite right for PLoS Biology, but would be interested in publishing it in PLoS Genetics" – enables PLoS to capitalize on the investments it makes in generating leads, processing initial submissions, and possibly even on editorial work to support the peer review process.

Home grown or partnerships?

As mentioned before, Community Journals, in steady state, do not represent a significant contribution, positive or negative, to PLoS' overall cash flow. This means that we do not necessarily need to build these journals from scratch or even "own" them in the sense of fully PLoS branding them.

Once we launch enough (4-6) "home-grown" Community Journals to unarguably demonstrate the financial viability of the publication fees model, other journals may fulfill the need for paper flow through a variety of partnership models. At one extreme the editorial staff of an existing journal might decide to jump ship from their publisher/society and bring us a PLoS branded journal fully formed, as it were (cf. recent defection of editorial staff of Journal of Algorithms). At the other extreme, an existing, independent open-access journal might enter into a relationship with PLoS whereby we mutually refer papers to one another, papers not suitable for Biology or Medicine going to the external journal, archival papers being referred from them to us.

Collaborating with existing journals, editorial boards, or scientific communities offers important benefits to PLoS, and in effect may lower many of the barriers we face in launching these community journals by bringing loyal authors, strong reputation, and committed editors. However, such collaborations will also raise specific challenges - financial, legal, practical, etc. – that we need to consider carefully. We are preparing a document outlining our thinking about how these collaborations might be integrated into our stable of community journals, for further discussion with the Board.

The envisioned end-state for PLoS, as a whole, is to publish or be associated through partnership with 20 open access Community Journals, 10 covering the range of biological sciences and 10 covering medical specialties.

Keeping the journals in the fold – the role of the EIC and professional editorial staff

For those Community Journals that PLoS launches or otherwise ends up branding, we need to ensure that the journals remain in line with the overall editorial goals of PLoS. Day-to-day management of the journal is in the hands of the Editor in Chief (EIC) who, although they may receive a stipend, is not a PLoS employee.

The EIC is responsible for the quality and scope of journal: recruiting editors and building the editorial board; setting the standards for a “must-read” journal for the field that functions within the principles of PLoS; making sure these standards are applied consistently from editor to editor, and that decisions are efficient, constructive, and fair; recruiting reviews editors; chairing an annual meeting of the editors (to be held in conjunction with a major scientific meeting for the community); acting as an ambassador for PLoS and for the PLoS Community Journal at scientific meetings; helping to select the next EIC and for transitioning the journal.

Term: Three years, renewable for an additional term of three years.

Reporting: We propose the creation of a publications committee of PLoS, to be composed of select members of the Board as well as editorial, production, and business/marketing staff from PLoS. The publications committee will provide an overall assessment of PLoS journals, ensuring that editorial and production standards are consistent, that the journals are financially stable, and that they are scientifically relevant. The EIC will report to the publications committee, which can replace the EIC should things not be running well on the journal and help facilitate the selection of and transition to a new EIC.

Staff support: publications manager (who can be dedicated to journal once submissions warrant it), as well as publications assistant and professional editor (these positions are shared among journals). Marketing support. Training on the JMS.

Compensation: \$25,000 per year to be used for compensation and travel during the initial term.

Financial Model

Time and costs to reach steady state

Growth in submissions/published articles per issue

Obviously the Community Journals are not going to launch at full capacity. As for PLoS Biology, the aim is to launch a Community Journal with 8-10 quality research articles in the initial issues, ramping up to full capacity (30) over the course of the next two years.

Likewise, submissions are expected to average around 30 per issue in the first few months after launch ramping up to 100 per month in a linear fashion over the next two years.

Staffing growth

Staffing levels are expected to grow with submissions, so although we expect the Journals at steady state to have one Publications Manager (PM) per journal, we will initially hire just two PMs to oversee the four initial journals. As total submissions pass 200 per month for the Community Journals we will add a further PM. We plan similar growth/hiring for Publications Assistants.

Conversely, in the early days, the journals will probably need more support from the PLoS professional editors than at end state. For the launch of these journals, we expect to utilize the existing staff, as indicated in each individual journal proposal. Over time we will backfill the positions on PLoS Biology and Medicine as the number of Community Journals grows.

Total costs until break-even

Given the above estimates for growth of staffing and paper flow, we estimate the total losses involved in launching a Community Journal to be approximately \$430,000 before it breaks even.

Steady state

Journal size

At steady state a PLoS Community Journal is expected to receive 100 submissions a month, of which it will publish 30%.

Submissions/month	100	
Published articles/month	30	70% rejection rate
Average article length	11 pages	
Front Section	1-2 articles per month (5-15 pages)	Handled mainly by academic editors
Total number of journals	10 Biology/10 Medicine	Ramped up over two years – see detailed timeline

Staffing

The majority of the staffing for this is from academic editors and the EIC, who is not a PLoS employee (although s/he may receive a stipend of approximate \$25k per year). PLoS will support the editorial staff with one PM who oversees and supports the editorial and production processes by ensuring that things are running smoothly, providing quality control etc.

Across the Community Journals there will also be a couple of Publications Assistants who provide administrative and proofing support to the production process.

Position	Role	Pro-rated salary (full-time)
Editor in Chief (1)	Overseeing journal, recruiting Editors, some manuscript handling and front section oversight, possibly occasional editorials	\$25k stipend (exact form to be determined)
Academic Editors (15-20, covering full range of the field)	Handling 1-2 manuscripts per week. Editorial decisions, inviting reviewers. Some front section management.	None
Senior Editors (0.1). At capacity there will be one full-time senior editor overseeing the Biology Community Journals and representing them to the other professional editorial staff.	Editorial support; managing paper flow between Tier 1 and 2; recruiting editors	~\$10K
Publications Manager (1)	Supporting editors, chasing reviewers, monitoring, processing some “front” content, article QC	~\$50K
Publications Assistant (0.2). There will be a couple of Publications assistants acting as support staff across the full range of the PLoS Community Journals.	Proofing, most if not all production steps are automated or outsourced	~\$5K

Steady-state profit and loss

For a steady-state Community Journal the models we have show the following revenues and expenses:

	Per month/Issue (\$)	Per annum (\$)
Costs		
• Direct Staff costs	9396	
• Production costs	14568	
• Marketing	2083	
• Travel	213	
• Overheads (office space, etc.)	6842	
Total Costs	33102	397,224
Revenues		
Publication charges (\$1500 per paper)	36000	432,000
Net Profit/(Loss)	2898	34,776

Editorial/Production Values

Editorial Overview

Each Community Journal covers a relatively large discipline and community of scientists in biology or medicine (equivalent to *Genetics*, *JCB*, *Ecology Letters*, *Genes & Development*, etc). They will publish “important/worthy” science for the field and be the type of journal that you need to watch if you are in that field. The journals will consist almost entirely of research articles with a limited front section of largely scientist-written reviews.

These journals are intended to be browsed online, rather than read in print. As for the existing journals, we will produce and distribute a relatively sizeable print run in the early months as marketing material, but this will soon be replaced by print-on-demand copies and any subscriptions we receive.

Production Standards

The extremely high production standards and level of service offered by PLoS Biology are not possible from a cost perspective nor warranted with respect to the competition.

The Community Journals will rely much more on authors’ taking responsibility for the quality of their own submissions: graphics at the correct resolution, etc. Copyediting will be done to match the high-level heading and reference style only, without detailed attention to the actual body of the paper.

Copyediting	For heading style and references only; not as much intervention as for Tier 1. No copyediting done for language, although this could be offered to authors for a fee. (Automated tools to be explored.) This will be outsourced at something like \$3/manuscript page (~\$50/paper).
Graphics preparation	More onus will be placed on the author to provide high-resolution graphics. Virtually no in-house figure prep/sizing.
Publication schedule	Articles are published continuously online – assembled into an “issue” each month or at other frequencies, for contents alerting (i.e., article-driven, not issue driven).
Print run	Small print run each month (for deposit libraries, ed board, authors). For some months of the first year, a more substantial print run for marketing at conferences (1000).

Marketing Plan

There are notes about marketing the community journals in each journal proposal, primarily focusing on meetings where the journal might be promoted.

In addition to marketing to the relevant scientific communities, it is clear that we need a “big message” marketing plan – a “Here come the PLoS community journals” campaign that is positive and collaborative, but also continues to “light a fire” under traditional publishers as our initial campaign did quite successfully. As a group, these community journals aim to bring us to the point where there is a quality open access journal for every paper in the biological and medical sciences and where, ultimately, the majority of papers are published in such journals. The individual community journals should not be viewed as just another place to publish – they must be seen as part of a larger movement.

On an even higher level, we need to continue to promote open access as a superior and sustainable publishing model and market PLoS as an innovative, high-quality publisher. To sustain the momentum of PLoS’ initial impact in the scientific publishing world, and the initial impact of PLoS Biology in particular, we want to work with the Board on creating the next stage of our marketing plan, to keep the visibility of our journals and the excitement about our mission high. First and foremost, we need to recruit and hire a marketing director who can help us enter this next critical phase for PLoS – this is underway.